

On August 2, 1914, Germany invaded Belgium and Europe went to war: Russia, France, Italy and Britain against Austria-Hungary, Germany and Turkey. Although it is likely that the immigrant newspapers kept their readers informed, there was no mention of the German invasion in the English newspapers of Buffalo. In the U.S. the Monroe Doctrine, adopted in 1823 and still adhered to by Congress, insisted on non-involvement in Old World conflicts. So except for awareness of nearby Canadians from Fort Erie and Niagara Falls, Ontario joining the fight for England, life went on as normal in the city. The main impact in Buffalo was an increase of labour requirements due to war contracts to provide supplies to the allies.

Then, on April 6, 1917, two days before Stephen Granger's 19th birthday, the United States declared war on Germany¹. Now Buffalo felt the impact of war. A bill passed quickly in Congress on May 18 declaring all males 21-31 years of age had to register for the draft. Buffalo's quota was 4,204 men, to be selected from all those who were eligible.

Stephen's brother Joseph obtained his naturalization papers two days before the declaration of war. As part of that process, he changed his name legally from József Gerencsér. At 22, he was now an American citizen and required to register for the draft. Joseph had truly adopted his new country. But this meant that if called up, Joseph would be fighting against Hungary, which as part of the Austrian Empire, had allied with Germany.² Now, Joseph's father József Gerencsér was the son of an infantryman, and his life in volatile Hungary had familiarized him with war. But what kind of conflict did his son's naturalization and registration

¹ From: *History of Buffalo and Erie County, 1914-1918*, Daniel J. Sweeney, Editor. (Published 1919)

² The United States declared war on Austria-Hungary on 7 December 1917.

cause? Was he proud to see his son's courage and commitment to his new country, or was József torn by finding himself on both sides of the war? In any case, like thousands of other families, the Gerencsárs were now faced with the frightening prospect of a son fighting a war overseas.

You had seven days to appeal for exemption to the draft. At first, exceptions were given to farmers, to those working in industries contributing to the war effort, and to those whose wives were dependent on their daily labour for support. In Buffalo, there was an immediate rush for marriage licenses. On one particular morning, 100 couples arrived at City Hall looking to get married; in response, the draft registry set up its office right next to the license bureau, hoping (successfully) to embarrass some young men into signing up for duty. Eventually, "anyone married after May 18, 1917 was considered to have known he was drafted and therefore unqualified to take on dependants as an exemption."³

Overall, Buffalo provided its quota and rallied strongly behind the war effort. On 31 August 1917, an estimated 50,000 people - the largest crowd ever to attend a public celebration in Buffalo - came together in Delaware Park in ceremonial tribute to the soldiers of the city. The first of the city's quota left for the front on the evening of 3 September.

³ From: *History of Buffalo and Erie County, 1914-1918*, Daniel J. Sweeney, editor.